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OO RUEHDA
DE RUEHAK #0889/01 1061328
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 161328Z APR 07
FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1755
RUEKJCS/CJCS WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHDC//PA
RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU
INFO RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS 7987
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 2529
RUEHDA/AMCONSUL ADANA 1860
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 5860
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
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JCS PASS J-5/CDR S. WRIGHT

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

MONDAY, APRIL 16, 2007

In Today's Papers

"Republic Rally" and its Aftermath

All papers over the weekend and today report that more than 300,000 people marched in Ankara on Saturday to protest against Prime Minister Erdogan's aspirations to become Turkey's next president. Tens of thousands of people traveled to Ankara from around Turkey to attend the rally held by non-government groups led by the Ataturk Thought Association. Academics, retired military officers, representatives of the judiciary, students and artists were among the participants in the rally that took place two days before the start of the presidential nominations. Many opposition politicians attended the demonstration, including Republican CHP leader Deniz Baykal and DSP leader Zeki Sezer.

"Turkey is secular and will remain secular," "Mullahs cannot sit in Cankaya, [the presidential residence]" and "We don't want imams in Cankaya," shouted protesters as they waved Turkish flags and banners with Ataturk's picture. Papers note it was the biggest political rally ever held in Ankara, seen by many as a determined show of force by the secularists. The demonstration came on the heels of a statement by the chief of the Turkish military, General Yasar Buyukanit, saying that the president must have secular values "not only in words but also in deeds." Outgoing President Sezer said on Friday that the regime "is under unprecedented threat" from Islamists since the founding of the republic in 1923. Prime Minister Erdogan said about the rally he was glad no violence broke out, adding the demonstrators exercised their democratic rights. Mainstream papers comment the rally showed the majority of Turks oppose the mentality of the ruling AKP, and that they want to live in a secular, democratic regime. Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet editorialized on Monday that it would be a mistake to regard the demonstration solely as a protest against Erdogan becoming president. "It was also an interesting warning to the US, which has already made incorrect assumptions about the Middle East. This demonstration gave Washington the opportunity to think that a 'moderate Islamic state' is not a realistic model for Turkey."

Erdogan on Presidency

All papers: Mainstream papers say Prime Minister Erdogan, on board his plane with journalists en route to Germany, gave some "signals" that he will run for the presidency. Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak, however, evaluated Erdogan's comments as "mixed signals."

"The new president will bring together the values of the republic and the values of Turkish people," Erdogan said. Erdogan said NGOs and the ruling AKP branches across Turkey supported his candidacy. He added that the mass rally held in Ankara over the weekend will not affect his decision, and that his "consultations" with civic organizations will continue. Responding to a question, Erdogan stressed his "brotherly ties" with Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul will continue whether he becomes president or not. The PM also said if a party leader is elected president, he should leave party politics behind. Erdogan has not yet said whether he will run for president, and has only hinted that he would wait until April 25, the last day candidacies are accepted, before making an announcement.

Barzani Meets Crocker

Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Yeni Safak and others report the president of the regional Kurdish administration in northern Iraq, Massoud Barzani, told the US Ambassador in Iraq, Ryan Crocker, that Kurds did not want tensions in ties with Turkey, and that the Kurds' problems with Iraq would be resolved according to Iraq's constitution. A statement released after the meeting said Barzani did not threaten Turkey, and the Kurds will not accept threats directed against them. The statement added Ambassador Crocker said Kurdish leaders should continue their "constructive" mission in Iraq.

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Volker on the PKK, Cyprus

Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak reports on page one that Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Kurt Volker said to the Greek daily To Vima that "our goal is to work together with the governments of Turkey and Iraq and encourage close cooperation on finding a solution to the PKK problem." On Cyprus, Volker said the US supports the efforts of the UN, and that the demolition of the barricade in the green zone in Nicosia was an opportunity for the sides to come together.

Editorial Commentary on Possible Turkish Incursions into Iraq
Yilmaz Oztuna warns against a Turkish incursion in the conservative daily Turkiye: "The policies of Iraqi Kurds rely on US protection and the fundamental goal is to ensure the continuation of American support for the Kurds. The northern Iraqi Kurds are very well aware of the fact that they will be punished by Turkey, Iran and the Arabs once the American forces pull out of Iraq. Turkey can use its strategic alliance with the US to its advantage. As soon as Turkey adopts a policy line parallel to Washington's, the US will have to abandon the Kurds as a reflection of realpolitik. On the other hand, a Turkish intervention into Northern Iraq will create a gap between Turkey and both the US and Europe. It will push Turkey into alienation and isolation."

In the intellectual Islamist-oriented Zaman, Washington-based Ali Aslan considers Washington's reactions to a possible Turkish action:

"Americans are preoccupied with the following question: What if the Turkish army goes ahead with the incursion plan and undermines the stability in the north? American diplomacy does not want this to happen. They see a Turkish incursion bringing a series of consequences, including problems with the Baghdad administration, providing another advantage to the Bush opponents in American politics. Therefore they are working really hard to eliminate those possibilities by giving clear messages to Ankara. The message can be summed up as 'General Buyukanit's remarks are worrying. A unilateral Turkish intervention in northern Iraq might cause very dangerous consequences. We should resolve this issue via diplomacy and dialogue.' The ideal solution, Washington believes, is for the PKK issue to be resolved between Ankara, Baghdad and Erbil even without Washington's direct involvement. It seems the northern Iraq issue and the Iraq issue in general will remain to be a hot topic on

the Ankara-Washington line in the days ahead."

TV News:
(NTV, 8 A.M.)

Domestic News

- Thousands of people attended funerals held in Izmir for 18 of 33 school students and teachers killed over the weekend during a trip to the tourist region of Cappadocia. A bus carrying the students and teachers collided with a truck on the Aksaray-Konya highway on Saturday, killing 33 people, injuring another thirty.
- Parliament Speaker Bulent Arinc dismissed the warnings of President Sezer that the secular regime in Turkey was under threat. Prime Minister Erdogan said Turkish people don't share the concerns of Sezer over secularism in Turkey.
- The AKP presidential candidate will be announced after Prime Minister Erdogan meets with the AKP executive board on April 25.
- A woman has been detained in Adana for plotting a bomb attack.

International News

- Iraqi President Jalal Talabani said the number of Turkmen in Northern Iraq was well below 5 million.
- Nechirvan Barzani, the prime minister of the regional government

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in northern Iraq, said Turkey is a very important country for the Kurds.

- US Defense Secretary Robert Gates said Turkish military operations against the PKK in northern Iraq will not help solve the PKK problem.
- Two British military personnel died and another five were injured when two transport helicopters crashed near a US air base in Taji near Baghdad.

WILSON